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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: KARBALA: ELECTIONS RUN SMOOTHLY, PM-BACKED SLATE
LEADING AS VOTE COUNT CONTINUES

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Don Cooke for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a PRT Karbala Reporting Cable

11. Summary: Election Day in Karbala proceeded smoothly amid tight security. According to IHEC figures, 60 percent of registered voters participated. The decision to extend voting for an hour enabled as many as 4,000 voters whose names were not properly recorded to cast their ballots. Initial ballot-counting as of late evening February 1 indicates that Prime Minister Maliki's "State of Law" Coalition received the largest share of votes, while former mayor and independent candidate Yusif Majeed al-Haboubi received the most individual votes. End summary.

Election Day Like Butter...

12. (C) As was the case with the "special needs" voting on January 28, the January 31 general elections proceeded with relatively few problems. According to Ali Kamonah of UNAMI, 350,000 of the province's 540,000 eligible voters participated -- one of the highest rates of participation in the country. At several polling places visited by PRT observers, women voters outnumbered men by as much as eight to one. The procedures were identical at each of the 12 polling places PRT observer teams visited. Personnel representing the Independent High Electoral Office (IHEC), the schools and observer organizations -- including various political parties -- behaved professionally. At one polling station in al-Hindiyah, a political-party observer who attempted to "help" a voter complete the ballot was warned that he would be kicked out if he tried again to render such assistance. At another in Karbala City, a middle school teacher, when asked by the PRT how she thought the day was going, beamed and repeated an Iraqi colloquialism: "Like butter in the tea."

...Or Maybe Margarine

13. (C) At several polling stations, questions arose concerning whether to allow persons to vote whose names either were missing from or not properly recorded in the rolls. By 1500, the PRT had heard from Kamonah that the problem was widespread. He said IHEC estimated that approximately 500 families, representing up to 4,000 eligible voters, were affected. An independent tribal candidate also contacted the PRT to express concern that many of those excluded comprised his list's base of support. By 1600, IHEC approved a proposal to accommodate "problem-registration voters" by keeping the polling stations open an additional hour, from 1700 to 1800. Official and commercial contacts reported at 1700 that citizens excluded earlier in the day were able to correct their registrations (by signing a separate register and affidavit) and allowed to vote.

Initial Results

14. (C) After initially saying they would wait until February 3 to begin tabulating the results, local IHEC officials began counting votes shortly after the polls closed. We still anticipate that IHEC will officially announce preliminary results on or about February 4. Although the vote count is not yet finished, Kamonah told the PRT that as of late evening on February 1, ballot-counting had produced the following results:

-- Former (2003) Karbala mayor Yusif Majeed al-Haboubi, who ran as the only candidate on his list, had received more votes than any other individual candidate. A public servant for more than 25 years, he is widely respected here and considered a leading contender to become the next governor. As we noted in previous reporting, his campaign spread a rumor that he survived an assassination attempt in order to win the sympathy vote, a gambit that appears to have paid off.

-- Some 25 to 30 percent of voters appear to have selected the Prime Minister's Da'wa-led State of Law coalition list, more than any other party or coalition list. Current Karbala Governor Aqeel Mahmoud al-Khazali ran on this list, which also includes independent followers of Oil Minister Husayn al-Shahrastani. (Note: This is a surprisingly strong showing by Da'wa and its members will be an important force on the Provincial Council (PC). It reflects the party's success in bootstrapping Maliki's popularity and in distancing itself from the "religious party" label. End Note.)

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-- The Council of Tribal Governorate Elders list, which includes a number of ISCI sympathizers -- notably current Acting PC Chairman Abd al-Al al-Yasiri -- did well, as did the pro-Muqtada al-Sadr Independent Free People's Trend list. Other top vote-getting groups that will be represented on the new PC include Ibrahim al-Jaafari's National Reform Trend and Dr. Ayad al-Alawi's al-Iraqiyah list.

-- In a surprise to some, the ISCI-backed Shaheed al-Mihrab (Martyr of the Imam Ali Shrine) list fared poorly, receiving only a small percentage of votes. This tracks with our analysis (detailed in previous reporting) that religious parties associated with the present PC would face a backlash from the voters.

Comment

15. (C) It is still early to speculate on the composition of the next PC, but it appears certain that Da'wa will remain prominent, with ISCI and its allies perhaps somewhat diminished. Haboubi's success is encouraging and may portend a strong showing by other independents. Their presence would help to moderate the internecine rivalries that have paralyzed the current council. End Comment.
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